A Critique of Max Weber's Philosophy of Social Science

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I

This essay is written in the belief that it is possible to say both where Max Weber's philosophy of the social sciences is mistaken and how these mistakes can be put right. This is a bold claim; but I am more concerned to vindicate the second part of it than the first. Although it ought by now to be possible to establish a definitive interpretation of Weber's *Wissenschaftslehre* in the sense of showing both what questions he was trying to answer and what was his aim in doing so, it is not my intention to undertake the exercise here. It will be enough for my purpose if his views as I read them are in fact amenable to correction along the lines which I shall propose. Whatever disagreement there may continue to be among Weber's interpreters on points of detail, it can safely be agreed that the arguments which he put forward are fundamental to the philosophy, or if you prefer the methodology, of the social sciences. Indeed, in the half-century since Weber's death it has come to be increasingly widely held that with perhaps the sole exception of Book VI of Mill's *System of Logic* (to which Weber may have owed more than is allowed to appear in his writings) there is still no other single work of comparable importance in the academic literature on these topics. If, therefore, my attempt to correct what I hold to be Weber's mistakes is successful, this will of itself constitute at least a modest contribution to the philosophy of the social sciences. As Weber remarked à propos of Eduard Meyer, there is more to be learned from a major author who is wrong than a nonentity who is right.[1]

Weber's works are still being corrected and rearranged in successive editions, and given that he neither completed his intended writings on methodology nor set out his views on it in any systematic way it is more or less optional what should be held to constitute his contribution to *Wissenschaftslehre* as such. However, the following seven separate items can, I think, be taken effectively to make up the canon.

[1] *GAW*, p. 215 n1 (a note omitted by Shils). The remark recurs also in a review of Wilhelm Ostwald (*GAW*, p. 425).

1. The three connected papers, which were to have been followed by a fourth, published in *Schmollers Jahrbuch* in 1903, 1905 and 1906, under the title 'Roscher und Knies und die Logischen Probleme der Historischen Nationalökonomie: I. Roschers historische Methode. II & III. Knies und das Irrationalitätsproblem'.

2. The editorial article entitled 'Die Objektivität sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis' published in 1904 in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* on the occasion of the joint assumption of its editorship by Weber, Werner Sombart and Edgar Jaffé. The first section of the article is explicity stated in an opening footnote to be an agreed statement of views common to the three editors, while the second and longer section is Weber's alone.

3. The critique of Eduard Meyer published in the *Archiv* in 1906 under the title 'Kritische Studien auf dem Gebiet der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik: I. Zur Auseinandersätzung mit Eduard Meyer. II. Objektive Möglichkeit und adäquate Verursachung in der historischen Kausalbetrachtung'. It too was to have had a sequel, but never did.

4. The long and hostile review of the second edition of Rudolf Stammler's *Wirtschaft und Recht nach der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung* published in the *Archiv* in 1907 under the title 'R. Stammler's "Ueberwindung" der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung', together with a shorter supplement to it found among Weber's papers after his death.

5. The paper 'Über einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie' published in *Logos* in 1913, which anticipates several of the themes of no. 7.

6. The paper 'Der Sinn der "Wertfreiheit" der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften' which was prepared in 1913 for a closed meeting of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* held in January 1914 and subsequently published in a revised form in *Logos* in 1918.

7. The opening sections of the posthumously published *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. The third edition of the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* includes the opening seven subsections, but the most important of them for Weber's methodology is the first and longest entitled 'Begriff der Soziologie und der "Sinns" sozialen Handeln'.

Of these seven, numbers 1, 4 and 5 are still not available in

English. Numbers 2, 3 and 6 are available in the volume edited by Shils, and number 7 in the volume edited by Parsons; and Parsons's translation has now been incorporated in the complete translation of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* published in the United States in 1968 as *Economy and Society* under the editorship of Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. In addition, Weber's lecture given at the University of Munich in 1919 on 'Science as a Vocation', which is included in the German editions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, is included in the selection edited by Gerth and Mills. The unavailability of numbers 1, 4 and 5, although regrettable, is not perhaps as serious as it might seem, since Weber is repetitive at many points and not only the same themes but even the same examples reappear from one part of his work to another. The lack of a complete English translation of the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* is serious; but it is, on balance, less serious than the lack of an adequate commentary.

The hazards of interpretation which Weber presents are certainly formidable. He is apt to complain, like many writers who are not only original but difficult, of being misunderstood; but the borderline between the interpretation of his views which he repudiates and the interpretation which he appears to require in its stead is often so hard to distinguish that those who have misunderstood him are scarcely to be blamed. Nor is the task made easier by the extent to which his views are developed in the course of criticising the views of others. This is not because a familiarity with the works of all the authors whom Weber criticises is a prerequisite for understanding the views of Weber himself: or if it is, then I have no business to claim an understanding of Weber. It is rather because in controverting a view which he holds to be incorrect he sometimes implies a more exaggerated counter-claim than would be consistent with what he says elsewhere. The necessary reconciliation can as a rule be effected. But the need for it in the first place is a further obstacle to the commentator who is concerned only with Weber's own view of the matter and who must be prepared, in criticising that view in its turn, to reject presuppositions which both Weber and some of his opponents may have shared.

In an essay with the purpose of this one, there is no need to go deeply into biographical detail. The circumstances of Weber's life and career no doubt explain much about both the manner and the content of his writings; but the validity of his arguments is a

separate matter from their provenance. On the other hand, an exposition of Weber's views on methodology may be not merely incomplete but even misleading if it makes no reference at all to his substantive views on history and politics. The risk in a digression into these is that any apparent gains in the understanding of his methodology will be offset by an implicit involvement in the controversies by which the interpretation of his writings is, and will no doubt continue to be, beset. Weber's political views divide his commentators (particularly in Germany) even more sharply than his views on the evolution of industrial capitalism, and if an acceptable interpretation of his philosophy of social science is dependent upon an uncontroversial interpretation of his economic history, his sociology of religion, and his politics, then the chances of achieving it are slender indeed. However, it should be possible to say enough about the substantive problems by which Weber was exercised (whatever view may be taken of his solutions) to make the exposition of his methodology easier without necessarily making it more controversial. Indeed, since Weber's substantive writings are a good deal less remote from his methodological writings than some of his critics are apt to maintain, there does seem a useful purpose to be served by opening a discussion of his methodology with a summary of his work as a whole.

The range of Weber's interests was, as is well known, remarkably wide, and the influences which can be detected within it are correspondingly various. But it seems now generally accepted that the two most important individual influences were first, Marx and second, Nietszche. The progression from the first to the second is easily discernible if one contrasts, say, the lecture which Weber delivered at Freiburg in 1896,[2] five years after his *Habilitation*, on the causes of the decline of ancient (i.e. Roman) civilisation with the lecture on 'Politics as a Vocation' which he delivered at Munich in what turned out to be the year before his death.[3] The first is Marxian not merely in substance but even in phrasing: the description of the 'signs of feudal society' as already apparent in the later empire, the reference to 'organic structural changes' occurring, and occurring of necessity, in the 'depth of society', and the interpreta-

[2] 'Die sozialen Gründe des Untergangs der antiken Kultur', in *GASW*, pp. 289–311, translated into English as 'The Social Causes of the Decay of Ancient Civilisation', *Journal of General Education* v (1950), 75–88.
[3] *GPS*, pp. 493–548 (G & M, pp. 77–128).

tion of the Roman economy in terms of the contradictions engendered by a mode of production resting on slavery more or less parallel the account of Marx himself. Indeed, the title of Weber's *Habilitation* dissertation – *The Agrarian History of Rome in its Significance for Public and Private Law* – reads as though directly prompted by Marx's dictum in the first volume of *Capital* that 'the secret history of the Roman republic is the history of its landed property'. The lecture on 'Politics as a Vocation', by contrast (although, unlike the companion lecture on 'Science as a Vocation', it makes no direct reference to Nietszche), betrays an unmistakable affinity to the Nietszchean idea of the 'will to power'. It was, in practice, the mixture of the two which generated the mature Weber's conception of the historical process as a struggle between 'charismatic' innovation and bureaucratic 'rationalisation' and the validity of that conception can be tested only by reference to the examples afforded by history itself.[4] But for the commentator on Weber's methodology, this conception of history makes it easier to understand his attempt to reconcile both the uniqueness and the subjective significance of historical events with the universal validity of causal laws. The manner of the reconciliation reveals the diverse and even contradictory influences of Dilthey, Menger, Rickert, Tönnies, Simmel, Troeltsch, Jellinek, Jaspers and others besides. But it would be a mistake to regard his methodology as explicable in terms of these influences alone. His substantive writings are not irrelevant to his methodology in the way that, say, Hume's *Treatise* can be considered quite independently of his *History*. A better parallel for English readers would be Collingwood: the connection may not be immediately obvious, but it would be quite mistaken to suppose that it isn't there.

This said, the sequence of Weber's principal substantive writings

[4] Even a cursory examination of Weber's historical writings is well beyond the scope of this essay. But it is worth remarking that just as Marx is credited in later life with the remark '*Je ne suis pas Marxiste*', so Weber is credited with a repudiation of the attempt to use the *Protestant Ethic* in support of anti-Marxism. See Paul Honigsheim, *On Max Weber* (tr. Rytina; East Lansing, 1968), p. 45: 'Hans Delbrück tried to make use of and to spread Weber's Calvinist-capitalist theory as a type of anti-Marxist idealism; Weber protested and told me, "I really must object to this; I am much more materialistic than Delbrück thinks" '; and cf. *GAW*, p. 169 (Shils, p. 71), *GAW*, p. 295, *GAR* I, 205–6 (Parsons, *PE*, p. 183) and *W & G* I, 349 (Fischoff, p. 208).

may be shortly summarised. Given the length and the seriousness of the nervous breakdown (or however it should be described)[5] which interrupted his career, his writings fall into two distinct periods. The first of these ends in 1897 when he moved from his first professorship at Freiburg to take Knies's chair at Heidelberg (and when, for what significance it may have, his father died); the second opens with his acceptance of the co-editorship of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1903, his visit to the United States in 1904, and the publication not only of the critique of Roscher and of the two articles on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* but also of articles on the system of land tenure in Prussia and the social structure of ancient Germany.[6] If we leave aside his doctoral dissertation on the mediaeval trading companies, published in 1889, the writings of the first period are concerned with three different but related themes: the legal and economic history of Rome, the stock exchange, and the economic policies of the Junkers in their estates to the East of the Elbe. In 1895, following his appointment at Freiburg, he delivered an Inaugural Lecture on the political economy of East Prussia which is remarkable (and was so regarded at the time) for its outspoken support of a doctrine of *Realpolitik* and advocacy of a policy of German national interest; and it has for this reason an ironic interest for the critic of his later methodology, since it is an example of precisely what he was to deplore in other occupants of university chairs.[7] Yet whatever their

[5] There is enough evidence on Weber's symptoms to provide scope for psychiatric conjecture, but not enough for any definitive diagnosis. Weber wrote an account of his symptoms himself which Marianne Weber passed to Jaspers, and Jaspers subsequently described to Eduard Baumgarten as unique in its objectivity and clarity. But under Hitler, Jaspers returned the manuscript to Marianne for fear that it would not be safe either in his own house or in a library, and she destroyed it during the Second World War for the same reason. See Eduard Baumgarten, *Max Weber: Werk und Person* (Tübingen, 1964), pp. 641–2.

[6] 'Agrarstatistische und sozialpolitische Betrachtungen zur Fideikommissfrage in Preussen', in *GASS*, pp. 323–93; and 'Der Streit um den charakter der altgermanischen Sozialverfassung in der deutschen Literatur des letzten Jahrzents', in *GASW*, pp. 508–56.

[7] The lecture, which was entitled 'Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik', is reprinted in *GPS*, pp. 1–25. Weber did, despite his later advocacy of value-free social science, continue to use his influence where he could in matters of social policy. In 1912, indeed, he called a meeting of the reformist members of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* to plan a public meeting in Frankfurt to found a new organisation explicitly dedicated to social reform – a project torpedoed only by Brentano's refusal to parti-

significance in the light of what was to follow them, the writings of Weber's first period would not, in the opinion of any commentator known to me, have by themselves earned him a reputation even distantly comparable to the reputation earned him by his subsequent work. By the time that he emerged from his illness, however, the ideas for which he is now celebrated seem to have been more or less fully formed. He did not abandon his earlier interests: not only do they recur at numerous points in his later work, but he wrote a substantially extended version of an earlier essay of 1897 on the economic history of the ancient world for the third edition of the *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften* which was published in 1909.[8] But whereas he could have been described in the earlier period as a legal historian and political economist, however unusually learned in the social and economic history of both the ancient and the modern world, the label is increasingly inadequate in the later. The time which he spent in Italy during his illness had helped to give him an interest in the history of art which is reflected to advantage in his methodological as well as his substantive writings; the *Protestant Ethic* was in due course followed by the series of essays on Confucianism and Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism, and ancient Judaism;[9] an abortive enquiry instituted by the *Verein* into the determinants of industrial workers' output took him for a short period into industrial psychology and empirical survey analysis;[10] his interest in the progressive 'rationalisation' of Western art led to an essay published only after his death on the

cipate unless Social Democrats were included, which led to a permanent breach between Brentano and Weber (see James J. Sheehan, *The Career of Lujo Brentano* [Chicago, 1966], p. 175). But this is not inconsistent with his subsequent stand at the *Verein*'s debate on values: as he had already written in the editorial of 1904, scientific objectivity and lack of personal convictions are quite separate matters (*GAW*, p. 157 (Shils, p. 60)).

[8] 'Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum', in *GASW*, pp. 1–288.

[9] These three essays first appeared in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* between 1916 and 1918, and were reprinted in the three volumes of *GAR*. They have been made available in English as *The Religion of China* (tr. Gerth; New York, 1951), *The Religion of India* (tr. Gerth and Martindale; New York, 1958) and *Ancient Judaism* (tr. Gerth and Martindale; New York, 1952). Translations from the 'Einleitung' and 'Zwischenbetrachtung' are available in G & M, chs. XI and XIII.

[10] See 'Methodologische Einleitung für die Erhebungen des Vereins für Sozialpolitik über Auslese und Anpassung (Berufswahl und Berufsschicksal) der Arbeiterschaft der geschlossene Grossindustrie' and 'Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit', in *GASS*, pp. 1–60, 61–255.

sociology of music;[11] and the monumental but uncompleted *Economy and Society* contains a sufficient wealth at once of typological analysis, comparative generalisation and straightforward economic and social history to earn for him by itself a place among the classics of European social theory.[12] Even this list omits his less strictly academic writings, which include articles on the politics of Germany and Russia,[13] as well as the companion lectures of 1919 on 'Politics as a Vocation' and 'Science as a Vocation'. It can all too often be said of writers on the philosophy of social science that they are preaching about subjects which they have never practised; but against none could the charge be less appropriately levelled than Weber.

Given this remarkable succession of writings, it is of course an oversimplification to treat Weber's views as though all of them were derived from a unitary, preconceived body of doctrine. Even if, as I have suggested, his principal ideas are recognisable as early as the *Protestant Ethic* and the critique of Knies (if not of Roscher), there could hardly fail to be some modification and development of them over the period. *Economy and Society*, in particular, although it contains much that can be found in his earlier writings, also contains much on questions both of method and of substance that cannot. But for the purpose of this essay, I think it is legitimate to treat his methodological writings, unsystematic though they may be, as a more or less coherent whole. Whatever the difficulties which they present, and whatever the changes in emphasis and style between the involved and laborious critique of Knies and the authoritative and systematic exposition of the meaning of social action which opens *Economy and Society*, Weber is not one of

[11] It was first published in 1921, and is translated into English as *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (tr. Martindale, Riedel and Neuwirth; Carbondale, Ill., 1958).

[12] In 1923, the year after the publication of *Economy and Society*, there was also published a version of the lectures which Weber delivered at Munich in 1919–20 on economic history, based on the notebooks of students who had attended them. It was published in English in 1927 under the title *General Economic History* (trans. F. H. Knight) but without the German editors' *Begriffliche Vorbemerkungen*. Its value for the study of Weber's methodology is at best marginal.

[13] The most important of the political articles are 'Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland' (*GPS*, pp. 233–79), 'Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland' (*GPS*, pp. 294–431), and a lecture delivered to an audience of Austrian officers in Vienna in 1918 on 'Der Sozialismus' (*GASS*, pp. 492–518).

those authors who keeps changing his mind or whose views as expressed in one part of his work are fundamentally at odds with his views as expressed in another. The methodological writings when taken together are by no means free of inconsistencies. But this, I believe, is almost always because they contain what might be called authentic confusions, which are if anything made easier to diagnose if they are consistently maintained.

The more difficult problem by which Weber's interpreters are faced is that much of his writing on methodology is not only so polemical but at the same time so very eclectic. It is accordingly difficult not only, as I have already remarked, accurately to sift out Weber's own views but also to detect just how far the authors whom he cites did or did not in fact elicit his agreement. He refers freely to many of his predecessors and contemporaries, including all those whom I have so far named. But the reader is left with the suspicion that some of these references suggest more, and others less, affinity than was in fact the case. Thus Weber's references to Rickert, for example, seem in part to have been dictated by politeness to a family friend: it is clearly unwarranted to speak of him, as one American commentator has done, as Weber's 'philosophical master'.[14] His references to Simmel, by contrast, frequent though they are, almost certainly underestimate the debt which he owed to him. Although the term 'ideal type' came from Jellinek and not from Simmel, the idea behind it, in the form which Weber was to adopt, probably came to him from Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, of which Weber's personal copy survives, as does his copy of Simmel's *Schopenhauer and Nietszche*, with numerous annotations in his own hand.[15]

It is even possible that the total lack of any reference to Durkheim, whom Weber's present-day commentators are likely to agree to be the most important of his contemporaries, should be read as a deliberate and therefore significant refusal of mention. There was

[14] H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: the Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890–1930* (New York, 1958), p. 309. Contrast Eugène Fleischmann, 'De Weber à Nietszche', *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* v (1964), 198–201, citing the testimony of Troeltsch's *Der Historismus und Seine Probleme*, published in 1922.

[15] See Friedrich H. Tenbruck, 'Die Genesis der Methodologie Max Webers', *Kölner Zeitschrift fur Soziologie* xi (1959), 620–4. That the actual term 'ideal type' came from Jellinek is attested by Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: ein Lebensbild* (Tübingen, 1926), p. 327; but see further Fleischmann, *op. cit.* p. 199 n37.

no reason for them ever to have met, since when Weber visited Paris from Heidelberg in the summer of 1911 it was purely for pleasure and when Durkheim visited Germany in 1886 Weber was still three years away from his doctorate. But when Durkheim's nephew and collaborator Marcel Mauss visited Weber at Heidelberg he saw a complete set of *L'Année Sociologique* on his shelves;[16] and Weber must in any case have known something of Durkheim's work through Simmel, who was listed on the title-page of the first (although only the first) volume of *L'Année* as an editorial collaborator, and even contributed an article to it. What is more, there is at least one passage in *Economy and Society* which reads almost unmistakably as an indirect reference to Durkheim: in the opening passage of the section on the sociology of religion Weber refers (in order to dismiss it) to the view that magic is to be distinguished from religion by the fact that priests do, and magicians don't, have an institutional affiliation, and it is hard to know who he could have been thinking of if it wasn't Durkheim.[17] It might even not be wholly fanciful to suggest a connection between Weber's animus against Stammler's *Wirtschaft und Recht* and the very favourable review of the first edition by François Simiand in the first volume of *L'Année*.

Not too much should, however, be made of all this, since no definite evidence will ever be forthcoming. It has been remarked that *L'Année* under Durkheim's editorship contained only the most fleeting references to Weber while Durkheim himself wrote an unfavourable review of the book on the 'Woman Question' published by Weber's wife, Marianne, in 1907.[18] But Marianne's book dealt with a subject in which Durkheim was genuinely interested, whereas Weber himself never wrote a *book* which *L'Année* should have been expected to review: the *Protestant Ethic*, after all, first consisted of two journal articles, and *L'Année* briefly noticed them both – the second very favourably. The question of Weber's attitude to Durkheim is relevant to the interpretation of his methodology only because it might perhaps be justifiable to read Weber as im-

[16] See Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* (tr. Howard and Weaver; London, 1968), II, 224, to whom this was reported by Mauss himself.

[17] *W & G* I, 259–60 (Fischoff, pp. 28–9).

[18] Edward A. Tiryakian, 'A Problem for the Sociology of Knowledge', *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* VII (1966), 334.

plicitly concerned on one topic, at least, to counter Durkheim's views.

It is commonly said of Weber that he was fighting a war on two fronts, against the extremes of Idealism on one side and Positivism on the other; but it ought not to be forgotten that he was at the same time fighting a related campaign, again on two fronts, where his opponents were the two extremes of Holism and Psychologism. Weber was what is nowadays called a 'methodological individualist'. Just as he was concerned to reject the extravagances of neo-Kantianism, whether in the style of Dilthey or of Rickert, without falling back into the arms of those who wished to deny all difference of kind between the social and the natural sciences, so he was concerned to reject any hint of reification of collective concepts without falling back into the arms of those who would unreservedly assimilate sociology to psychology. There is extant a letter written in the last few months of his life in which he goes so far as to say that his reason for being a sociologist at all is to put an end to the influence of collective concepts by which the subject continues to be haunted;[19] and although this may not in fact have been an implicit reference to Durkheim (since it could, after all, apply merely to the German 'organicists') the latter-day commentator must be tempted to remark that even if it isn't, it might as well be. To invoke Durkheim as Weber's notional opponent makes it easier to disentangle some of the strands which are almost inextricably intertwined in Weber's criticisms of his philosophical and sociological compatriots. Admittedly, it is for the very reason that they were so intertwined that Weber's distinctive compromise is so valuable. But it is important to remember that there is no necessary logical connection between Idealism and Holism on the one hand or between Positivism and Individualism on the other. Durkheim was both Positivist and Holist; and whatever may be said against Durkheim's own *Rules of Sociological Method*, it might turn out that something more of Positivism should be retained than Weber was willing to do without affecting one way or the other his position on the debate between Individualism in the manner of Mill and Holism in the manner of Durkheim.

The entanglement of ostensibly related doctrines is further

[19] Weber to Robert Liefmann, 9 March 1920, quoted by Wolfgang Mommsen, 'Max Weber's Political Sociology and his Philosophy of World History', *International Social Science Journal* XVII (1965), p. 44 n2.

complicated by the simultaneous arguments which were equally popular among Weber's contemporaries over the demarcations within the sciences as a whole, and particularly the demarcation between the sciences of '*Geist*' or '*Kultur*' and the sciences of nature. This might seem, at first sight, a distinction which could be predicted to be argued along the lines of the Idealist/Positivist, even if not of the Holist/Individualist dispute. But the Idealists were divided on it. Where Dilthey had distinguished the *Geisteswissenschaften* in terms of subject-matter, Windelband and Rickert distinguished *Geschichtswissenschaft* in terms of method: in the vocabulary which we owe to Windelband, the 'historical' sciences are not 'nomothetic' but 'idiographic'. The boundaries which the two schools wished to draw were therefore quite different, and it was possible for two disputants to agree that there *is* a boundary while disagreeing whether the social sciences are to be distinguished from the natural because the former do, but the latter do not, seek to explain human thought and culture or because the former cannot, but the latter can, proffer well-tested explanations in terms of general laws. Once again, there is no necessary logical connection. History may proffer successful explanations by reference to general laws although it deals with what goes on in the human mind just as natural science may include historical explanations of an 'idiographic' kind. Weber's position, to be sure, was not that of Windelband any more than that of Rickert or Dilthey. But he did distinguish sociology – a term which in general he disliked – from history on the grounds that the historian does not try to construct 'type concepts' or formulate 'general rules' whereas the sociologist does.[20] There is nothing wrong with this distinction if it is a useful one,

[20] The contrast is drawn in *GAW*, p. 545 (Parsons, p. 109). For Weber's dislike of the term, see his remark about '*eine Gesellschaft mit diesem bei uns unpopulären Namen*' in his address at the first meeting of the German Sociological Association in 1910 (*GASS*, p. 431); and Jaspers's testimony that 'He was opposed to the establishment of professorships in sociology' (*Three Essays: Leonardo, Descartes, Max Weber* [tr. Manheim; New York, 1953], p. 247). It has been persuasively argued by Emerich Francis, 'Kultur und Gesellschaft in der Soziologie Max Webers', in Karl Engisch et al., eds., *Max Weber: Gedächtnisschrift der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München* (Berlin, 1966), pp. 89–114, that Weber's writings show a progressive shift away from the notion of *Kulturwissenschaft* and towards that of *Soziologie*. But it may be significant that even so Weber describes himself in 'Science as a Vocation' as a 'political economist' (*GAW*, p. 566 (G & M, p. 129); and cf. the reference to 'sociologists' at p. 572 (G & M, p. 134)), while even the letter to Liefmann (above, n. 19)

whether analytically or descriptively. But it does leave open the possibility that from the standpoint of the logic of explanation the difference might be less important than it seemed three-quarters of a century ago.

Descriptively, the difference is clear enough. The German historians of Weber's youth didn't generalise, although they were self-consciously scientific; and conversely the psychologists, who did generalise, were responsible in Weber's eyes for pushing the gap between 'subjective' and 'objective' altogether too wide. But their variations of practice as well as of doctrine made it remarkably difficult (as it is to this day) to formulate precisely the fundamental problems of the philosophy of the social sciences and to find adequate labels to characterise the views of the rival individuals or schools among which a choice, if reconciliation is impossible, needs to be made. I have talked about Idealists and Positivists; but these terms can cover several mutually incompatible viewpoints even apart from the differences with which they may or may not coincide on the separate questions of methodological individualism and the demarcation of natural from social science. Despite their imprecision, and more specifically the differences between self-styled 'Positivists' and self-styled 'Naturalists', I shall continue in this essay to use these terms because it is still useful to have some sort of label to distinguish those who do from those who don't believe that there is some fundamental difference in kind between the physical and biological sciences on one side and the sciences of human behaviour on the other. But I had better emphasise that they are labels of convenience only. It would undo all the purpose of what I have said about the difficulty of extracting Weber's arguments from their polemical context if I were then to categorise them in terms as misleading as any that either he or his adversaries used.

One final preliminary point remains to be made. Despite what I have said about the connection between Weber's methodological and substantive writings, I propose to ignore the one topic on which his ideas most obviously furnish this connection – his typology of action. As we shall see, Weber believed that the terms in which sociological explanations must be couched are terms which classify the self-conscious actions of persons responsive to the

hardly betrays an unequivocal acceptance of the title 'sociologist'. (Incidentally, too, Francis misprints [p. 103] Weber's remark at the 1910 congress as '*diesem bei uns populären Namen*'.)

actions of other persons by reference to the motives which can be ascribed to them. It follows that we should expect him to propose some general classification of human action according to motive; and this is just what he does in distinguishing 'affectual', 'traditional', 'value-rational' and 'purpose-rational' action. Much critical attention has been given to this classification. But my reason for ignoring it is simply that it raises more difficulties than it solves. Whatever its rationale, Weber's classification of action cannot be rescued, even if drastically modified, from the objections which have been levelled against it. The distinction between 'value-rationality' and 'purpose-rationality', to which corresponds the distinction more common among English-speaking sociologists between 'expressive' and 'instrumental' action, continues to be widely used. But it can as well be expressed in terms of the traditional distinction between means and ends, and since the traditional distinction involves no ambiguities which are not inherent in Weber's formulation also, it seems more sensible to revert to the traditional distinction. In so doing, I have no wish necessarily to deny that a general classification of motives may be necessary to the explanation of the social behaviour of human beings; that Weber's use of the term 'rationalisation' to describe the fundamental process which he saw at work in Western society may be both legitimate and informative; or that 'rationality' may not be capable of precise formulation within certain definable categories of human actions and the decisions which precede them. My wish is simply to avoid the risk that by failing to discard without compunction one of the more vulnerable of Weber's doctrines I might weaken my claims on behalf of those others that seem to me to be of more lasting interest.